

## WALK YOUR TALK

# The Empty Bowl

*Why Usefulness Comes From What Isn't There*

Unity on Maui • Rev. Blaine Tinsley • June 21, 2026

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### This Week's Big Idea

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A bowl is useful not because of the clay, but because of the hollow it holds. The part that isn't there is the part that serves. We spend our lives accumulating substance — more stuff, more knowing, more noise — convinced that fullness makes us useful. But Lao Tzu reminds us that capacity lives in the empty space. Emptiness is not lack. Emptiness is readiness. You cannot fill a cup that is already full, and you cannot receive a new grace while clutching every old thing. The doorway is useful because of the place where the wall isn't; the room is livable because of the space the bricks make room for. So it is with a life. The spiritual life is less about adding and more about clearing room for Spirit to move — less about becoming impressively full, and more about becoming faithfully open.

### Wisdom for the Week

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*We shape clay into a vessel, but it is the emptiness within that makes it useful... We work with being, but it is non-being that we use. — Tao Te Ching, Ch. 11*

*Christ Jesus... emptied himself, taking the form of a servant. — Philippians 2:5-7*

**Unity lens:** We love to pray “fill me, Spirit” — but that prayer assumes there is room to be filled. The I AM does not move into the spaces we've crammed with our own agendas; it moves into the space we clear. Self-emptying (*kenosis*) is not loss. It is how we become useful to God.

### A Story to Carry

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In watercolor, you cannot paint white. The light on the water, the mist off a waterfall, the brightest highlight — all of it is simply the paper the artist chose to leave untouched. Emily used to say the hardest discipline wasn't learning what to put down; it was learning what to leave alone. The white spaces were where the painting breathed. Grief leaves a space too, and every instinct rushes to fill it. But what if the empty place, like the white of the page, is where the light gets in? Sometimes the most faithful thing we can do is leave it open and trust it to breathe.

### Three Questions to Live This Week

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- 1. What can I empty?** Notice where life is overflowing — the calendar with no white space, the grudge gone heavy from carrying, the old story (“I'm the responsible one, I can never put anything down”). You don't have to throw the bowl away. Just pour one thing out. Even “I'm willing to forgive” is enough to begin.
- 2. What space am I afraid of?** Most filling is really avoidance — the phone at the red light, the TV on the instant you're home, the over-scheduling that guarantees you never sit in a quiet room. The emptiness we most avoid usually has the most to give. The fear is the doorway. Let one silence stay empty long enough to hear what's on the other side.
- 3. What might fill it, if I stopped forcing?** A bowl fills by being held open, not by straining. Remember the good that arrived only when you stopped chasing — the peace after you set the problem down, the idea that surfaced once you left the blank page alone. Stop forcing, and make room for something wiser than your effort.

## For Your Journal

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*Set aside ten quiet minutes this week and write into these. Don't edit — just pour out.*

- Where in my life have I confused being *full* with being useful? What am I afraid would happen if I made more space?
- What is one thing — a commitment, a resentment, a story about myself — that I am ready to pour out of the bowl?
- When has something good arrived in my life only after I stopped forcing it? What might that teach me about what I'm gripping now?

## A Daily Practice

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Each morning this week, before you reach for your phone, sit for two minutes with empty hands resting open in your lap — the posture of a bowl. Breathe. Release one thing you've been gripping. Then silently offer the affirmation below, and let the day pour in. In the evening, notice one moment when an empty space — a pause, a silence, an unscheduled hour — turned out to hold a quiet gift.

## Living It Out

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**In your relationships: The** most generous thing you can offer someone is often empty space — a silence you don't rush to fill, a listening that doesn't leap to advice. Let a conversation breathe this week. Notice how much more arrives when you stop filling every pause.

**In your work: Leave** a margin. An unscheduled hour is not wasted time — it is the doorway through which the unexpected good, the fresh idea, and the divine interruption can enter. Protect one empty space on your calendar and guard it like a sanctuary.

**In your spirit: When** you pray this week, spend as much time listening as asking. Hold the bowl open before you fill it with words. The empty, waiting silence is not the absence of prayer — it may be the truest prayer of all.

## Affirmation

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***I AM open. I AM spacious.***

***What I release makes room for what is mine to receive.***

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*May you trust the hollow of the bowl — and discover your wholeness was never about what you added, but about the open space you were brave enough to keep.*